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ABSTRACT

During 1977 and 1978, Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois, served as one of eleven national demonstration models in the development of community college-coordinated, community-based discussion forums. In fall 1977 the college was joined by twenty-seven co-sponsoring community organizations in holding nine town meetings to discuss topics suggested by the Course by Newspaper (CbN) "Crime and Justice in America." In spring 1978 the college and 17 other community organizations sponsored six town meetings and four film discussions in a series entitled "The Impact of Mass Media on American Life" that paralled the CbN "Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life." The Black Hawk College model was unique among the demonstration models in the following ways: leadership and responsibility for the projects came totally from within the college's traditional university parallel faculty; articles written by the faculty provided a local perspective on the national CbN essays; an attempt was made to reach results, to formulate solutions, and to publicize them; and the projects were co-sponsored by the state district library system and member public libraries. Both projects resulted in several spin-off activities, especially among community co-sponsoring organizations and between these organizations and the college. (Author/MB)

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CbN Community Forums:

The Black Hawk College Model

Mary A. Stevens

A paper presented at Community Forums Regional Workshops

at Coastline Community College, Newport Beach, California, October 25, 1978

and College of Marin, Kentfield, California, October 26, 1978

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ABSTRACT

Author: Mary A. Stevens, Professor, Department of English, Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois

Title: "CbN Community Forums: the Black Hawk College Model"

A paper presented at Community Forums Regional Workshops conducted by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Community Forums Office, at Coastline Community College, Newport Beach, California, October 25, 1978, and College of Marin, Kentfield, California, October 26, 1978

During 1977 and 1978, Black Hawk College, Moline, Illinois, served as one of eleven national demonstration models in the development of community college-coordinated, community-based discussion forums. In the fall, supported by a grant from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the college was joined by twenty-seven co-sponsoring community organizations in holding nine town meetings to discuss topics suggested by the Course by Newspaper "Crime and Justice in America." In the spring, supported by a regrant from the Illinois Humanities Council with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the college and seventeen other community organizations sponsored six town meetings and four film discussions in a series entitled "The Impact of Mass Media on American Life" that paralleled the CoN "Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life."

The "Black Hawk College Model" was unique among the demonstration models in the following ways: leadership and responsibility for the projects came totally from within the college's traditional university parallel faculty who were introduced to cooperative, community-based discussion; articles written by the faculty provided a local perspective on the national CbN essays which were appearing in two local newspapers; an attempt was made to reach results, to formulate solutions, and to publicize them; and the projects were co-sponsored by the state district library system and member public libraries.

Both projects resulted in rather continuous spin-off activities, especially among community co-sponsoring organizations and between these organizations and the college. The spring forums were planned, coordinated, and evaluated by a forums advisory committee, which was composed of all humanities faculty serving as discussion moderators and a representative from each community co-sponsoring organization, a structure that was found to work well. Also a part of the spring forums was a special training workshop for faculty moderators.

CbN COMMUNITY FORUMS
THE BLACK HAWK COLLEGE MODEL

by Mary A. Stevens, Professor
Department of English
Black Hawk College
Moline, Illinois
October, 1978

I'd like to begin with a brief digression on model-building. Speakers and writers who begin with digressions have always made me uneasy, but the view of myself as a model-builder, for some reason, makes me even more uncomfortable. From one point of view, it seems pretentious and even downright overbearing to stand up here and tell you that I was responsible for the construction of a model community forum. However, in reviewing my notes recently from a training workshop for site directors in the "Crime and Justice" effort, I learned that some time between 9:45 and 10:30 a.m. on May 26, 1977, Diane Eisenberg, our national project director, told us that her greatest concern was that our projects provide replicable models. And, up to our elbows and knees in the sticky, dirty world of "Crime and Justice in America," we tried to keep this objective in mind. So, although at times I viewed our work as hardly exemplary, after a certain amount of review and considerable reflection in tranquility, I can tell you that I have learned quite a bit about community forums and community-based discussion and education this last year. Thus, my intention is to share these discoveries with you--at times, models of what to do, and at times, of what to avoid.

Conscientiously aware of my model-building responsibilities, some time last November I sat down and created an organizational chart to record as accurately as possible the structure of our operation.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART—

CbN Community Forum Model
Black Hawk College
Moline, Illinois

I wouldn't want to stay too long upon this organizational chart, for doing so might suggest that you could actually figure it out. But let me point out from it, two aspects of the "Black Hawk College Model" that are, more seriously, of some importance.

First of all, our projects operated from the center of our traditional university parallel programs, and they were entirely the work and responsibility of our humanities faculty. In addition to being a professor in our English department, I am also division director of interdisciplinary and alternative study, a position to which I have been elected by my teaching colleagues. The main reason that our projects were based in this division is that at Black Hawk College both "Popular Culture" and "Crime and Justice in America" have been designated as problems-oriented interdisciplinary courses. In retrospect, I see that, with the exception of our adult continuing education program, this division was really the only place to base projects such as these. The division has no faculty--believe me, not the result of some grand new educational delivery system--but it draws freely upon faculty in the other three divisions of the university parallel programs, including humanities faculty who are sprinkled through several departments in two of these divisions. Additionally, this division is supposed to be a place for cooperation and innovation, and, within it, are grouped a number of our new college outreach efforts, including our public library-based instructional program, which I also coordinate. Thus, by both design and purpose, our division of interdisciplinary and alternative study <u>should</u> be doing projects like community forums. To quote from my report to the Illinois Humanities Council on our spring forums, "This project was administered and executed entirely

by Black Hawk College's humanities faculty and the college's community; they appreciated the opportunity."

Second, although essentially an attempt at humor, the labyrinth of dotted and solid lines on this chart representing official and unofficial chains of command; affiliations; cooperations; and horizontal, vertical, and even perpendicular communication suggests the many new ties and channels that the projects created. They did so, quite simply, because, although our adult continuing education program has participated in cooperative, community-based discussion series, our traditional transfer faculty had not done so before. Thus, our projects were new and rather exciting experiences for us, and, as a result, they broke new ground and established new associations.

These are two characteristics of the "Black Hawk College Model," then, that I believe are of fundamental importance: the projects belonged to the traditional humanities faculty, and they introduced them to new experiences in cooperative, community-based discussion. Furthermore, we took the work seriously, were enthusiastic about it, and concluded that we should be doing more of it. Symbolic of this faculty support was co-sponsorship of our spring forums by the Black Hawk College Teachers' Union, AFT Local #1836. So, if any of you are administrators who worry about whether or not you can get your faculty interested in community forums, remember our support for the Black Hawk College projects.

With this background, let me now describe the "Black Hawk College Model" in some detail, emphasizing especially what we learned while building it. Our fall forums on "Crime and Justice in America" were supported by a grant from AACJC with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I suspect that we were selected to serve

as a model for rural community colleges. With 2,200 square miles of college district occupying all or parts of nine Illinois counties, most of our college district is rich corn or soy bean fields. Our larger Quad-Cities Campus, from which the project operated, is located in Moline, Illinois, which is the international headquarters of John Deere and which claims to be "The Farm Implement Capital of the World." Our other campus in Kewanee, Illinois, claims to be "The Hog Capital of the World." We have a service population of about 250,000, and, last year, we served 17,500 of these residents. About 7,500 enrolled as students, resulting in a full-time-student equivalent count of about 4,000. Thus, we are not too different from many other community colleges.

Certain characteristics served to distinguish our project from others. Two local newspapers--the Rock Island Argus and the Kewanee Star Courier--carried the local Course by Newspaper, and each week there was a parallel essay in these papers that placed the information without our local context. Our newspaper editors liked this component of our project, and we thought that it made good sense with information that has such a varied applicability from state to state and community to community. In these essays, we discussed, for example, rural crime, the local judicial system, and the Illinois criminal code.

In addition, our project attempted to reach results, to formulate solutions, and to publicize them. Thus, we used a panel of three local experts--an attorney, a social worker, and a police officer--each representing an identifiable sector of the criminal justice system. These experts attended forums, made presentations at them, and helped to guide the project in other ways as well. At the end of the forums, they met to consider written reports from each of the discussions,

and, based upon them, they developed a list of recommendations for community improvement. With other local experts, these three individuals then discussed the topics and presented the recommendations in four thirty-minute television tapes produced in our college studio and broadcast on local open air and cable television. This use of media considerably increased the visibility of the project in our community, and, therefore, I would involve television in a similar way in all subsequent discussion series.

We called our forums "town meetings" in part because the term seems almost indigenous to rural America and also because it suggests the intention to reach informed conclusions that will result in action. Although we promised four such town meetings, by the end of the project, we had held nine, primarily because of requests for additional meetings from our community co-sponsors. Four of these town meetings were held in public libraries, three in community centers, one in a church, and one on campus. Attendance ranged from 74 to 20; meetings were scheduled at both afternoon and evening times, in small and large towns, and with close links to co-sponsoring community groups and with no such ties.

The format for each town meeting was similar. Each began with a short slide/tape presentation focusing on major aspects of the topic "Crime and Justice in America." Each was moderated by a member of the college's humanities faculty and included several local experts who made short informational presentations and then served as resources during discussion. At the end of each meeting, the moderator attempted to reach conclusions and to summarize, information that was the basis of a written moderator's report.

Local organizations joined our project as co-sponsors. Originally, we had thought that there would be eight such groups, but actually we had twenty-seven. A rather unusual organizational linkage was with the River Bend Library System and six of its member public libraries, an affiliation that built upon an existing cooperative agreement between college and library district to provide off-campus learning centers in these six public libraries. The River Bend Library System prepared a bibliography of materials available on the topics and distributed promotional materials through its van delivery service to public libraries. Co-sponsoring public libraries themselves made project audiovisual materials, including videocassettes, available to the public; provided meeting space, and assisted in organizing town meetings and in securing local co-sponsors in their communities. Because of their help, we were able to hold town meetings in communities at a considerable distance from campus.

We also used existing faculty memberships in community organizations to secure co-sponsors. One of the most interesting such linkages was co-sponsorship by the Quad-City area UAW Cap Council, which we secured through a member of our teachers' union who is also in charge of our labor studies program.

And some additional affiliations were new to us, resulting from the obvious interest of a group or a social agency in the topic of "Crime and Justice in America."

Co-sponsors provided publicity through their organizations, refreshments, and presenters. One paid for printing brochures for a town meeting that it co-sponsored, and another paid travel expenses for an out-of-town presenter.

We publicized the project by brochures, posters, press releases, newspaper ads, announcements in organizational newsletters and at meetings, and library displays. We also used the introductory workshop in September to inform the community of project goals and events. In addition, we received considerable publicity through news media coverage of the town meetings themselves, coverage that was much better than we had ever expected.

By the end of the project, I know that I had learned a great deal myself. In fact, I now claim faculty work in community forums as one important new possible approach to faculty development. We had learned about bulk mailing techniques and target audiences; we had established contacts in local news media; we knew much more about our community's organizations, and we had discovered that there was much we didn't know. There have been times at which I have felt sorry for our administrators who let us run the whole show, for, now, they don't share in our mailing lists, our new expertise, and our friends in the community.

And, already by January of 1978, we were experiencing some project "spin-off." We had been called upon to provide speakers for meetings of community organizations; a study group on child abuse had begun; I had received some unusual calls in my office from individuals wishing information or help; and the police officer on our panel had decided to hold his own town meeting on police protection.

However, from another point of view, I look back on our "Crime and Justice" project with some reservations and discomfort. Recounting these events has been similar to what I imagine it would be like to review my whole life in flashes at a time of trauma, like just before

my death. For, in retrospect, I realize that we did so much the hard way and so much the wrong way.

First of all, we didn't know how to approach potential co-sponsors or how much to expect from them. Second, we had no coordinating advisory committee other than our panel of experts, and this panel did not meet early enough. Third, our faculty moderators varied greatly in quality and in the amount of preparation that they had completed for discussions. Fourth, we scheduled our discussions in stupid ways: one was held in a rural area in the middle of the peak harvest time, and another managed to conflict with a school board meeting, a zoning meeting, and a euchre tournament. And, finally, we didn't know some fundamental methods to gain publicity and to work with community experts, the news media, and co-sponsors.

As the organizational chart below suggests--a serious one this time--our project was too dispersed and its real communication links faulty.

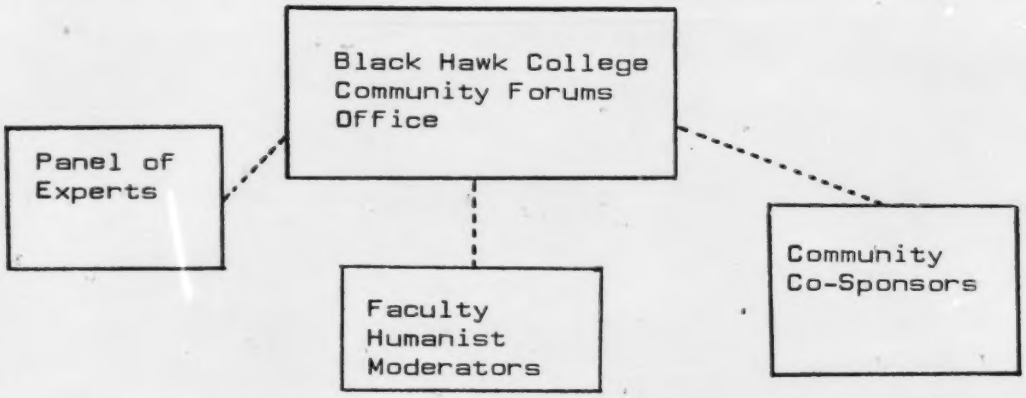

FIGURE 2: Organization of Black Hawk College "Crime and Justice" Community Forums

Here we, Black Hawk College, are in the middle, the major link in all activities. Over here is our panel of experts to which we communicate, and over here on the other side are our community co-sponsors. Once again, we are the only link with and between them. In short, Black Hawk College dominated the project and, as a result, it had to do most of the work.

Fortunately, when we agreed with the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges to do "Crime and Justice," we also committed ourselves to do a similar series of forums in the spring on "Popular Culture." That requirement resulted in significant advances in the state of the art of community forums at Black Hawk College, and, through the sustained community forums effort that it brought about, it created most of our project's "spin-off." I can think back on our spring forums with very little agony and with much pleasure. Thus, I prefer to think of this project as the "Black Hawk College Model."

Our spring forums on popular culture were supported by a regrant from the Illinois Humanities Council. Assistance from this grant allowed us to continue our efforts on the same level as in the fall. There was another important benefit as well. None of us in the traditional humanities faculty could ever remember being involved at Black Hawk College in a project supported by the Illinois Humanities Council. Most simply, then, we found the Council, and I was also surprised to discover that the Council seemed pleased to have a fundable proposal from our part of the state. As a result, we can really claim as additional "spin-off" from our Forums another grant proposal from a faculty member at Black Hawk College this year to the Illinois Humanities Council. And, presently, three or four of my faculty colleagues are

urging me to write a proposal to the Council for another discussion series.

Our spring project included seventeen community co-sponsors, six town meetings, and four film discussions. Once again, we intended to draw conclusions and to make recommendations, this time through the work of a forum advisory committee.

The chart below summarizes the organization of our spring forums, and this plan is the one that I'd personally use next time as well.

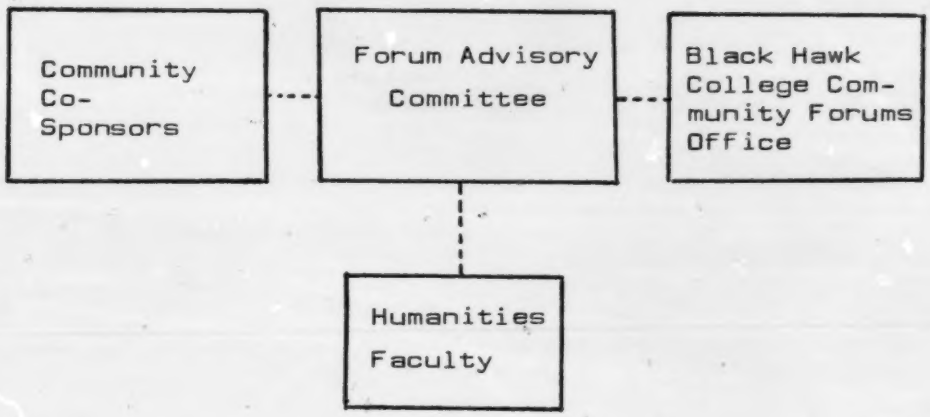

FIGURE 3: Organization of Black Hawk College "Popular Culture" Community Forum

The center of the project is the forum advisory committee, composed of the popular culture course instructors, humanities faculty serving as discussion moderators, and a representative from each of the community co-sponsors. Black Hawk College only coordinated this work, and the co-sponsors cooperated in the project. In this way, the college moved from the middle to the sidelines and shared the responsibility, the work, and the community visibility. There is another aspect of

this plan that all of us from the faculty appreciated as well; we sat down around a table with a rather diverse group of representatives from our community and put together and carried out a project. We believed that we all benefited from this experience. In addition, representatives from many of the co-sponsoring community organizations found that it was beneficial to meet each other and to learn about the purposes and activities of other organizations. Some of our most interesting and rewarding project "spin-off" involves the results of such interaction.

I believe that the best way to begin a description of our spring forums is chronologically. Before the end of the fall forums, we'd begun on the spring ones. Six faculty members from the humanities had volunteered their services as moderators, and the popular culture instructors had plans to conduct four film discussions in public libraries. We reviewed our fall co-sponsors critically, selecting those who had seemed the most supportive and interested. Then we sent each an invitational letter in which we clearly stated our expectations and needs from them. Included was the requirement that each co-sponsor designate a member to serve as its representative on the forum advisory committee. Also included was what I think is an important summary statement:

> Serving as a catalyst in the development of...community forums is one important way for all community colleges to serve their district. The faculty at Black Hawk College recognizes this responsibility and wishes to join with representatives from other interested community groups and agencies in holding another community forum.... We have learned already that the most important essentials for this type of community project are wide interest, help from a number of community agencies, concern and time.

We were happy that all previous co-sponsors whom we invited joined us once again.

Next, we got out the lists of organizations that we had collected in the fall and reviewed them to find groups that might be especially interested in the topic of popular culture and mass media. For example, we knew that we had to secure co-sponsorship from the PTA's district council because of its national project on the effects of television violence on children. Locally it's a strong organization, and one of its leaders was national PTA president at the time that the television watch began. Once again, we wrote each of these organizations an informational letter of invitation and then followed up with a phone call a few days later. We sought out faculty who were members of the organizations to help or worked through friends. Again, all that we invited joined with us. And, finally, we sent out a press release inviting other interested groups to join; two accepted the invitation. All of this work may sound unnecessarily cautious and even slightly manipulative, but remember that we had no established links with community groups or past associations to build upon. Next time, we'll have these.

With seventeen cooperating groups and their representatives, we held our first forum advisory committee meeting at which we planned a great deal of the discussion forum series. Members suggested presenters, meeting places, and dates. They knew of conflicting events, of methods to secure meeting places, and of community experts. They offered their organization's resources for publicity, including a promise of 4,000 gummed labels for mailing our project brochures and the listing of our events in the calendars appearing in all local newspapers. I realized that I could sit back and enjoy the project a great deal more the second time through.

The next week we held our faculty humanist training workshop, for we had learned that we needed to prepare ourselves well to go into the community discussion business. Our faculty has strong and good working relationships, but, as I am sure is the case elsewhere, we ordinarily do not allow ourselves the luxury of meeting together for an extended period of time to work cooperatively and to exchange opinions on any issues other than salary, working conditions, and academic policy. Diane Eisenberg and John Schonleber assisted us as we talked about popular culture, the humanities issues within the topics, the importance of and methods for non-partisan discussion, possible forum formats, and ways to work with presenters. By the end of this workshop, our project seemed well in hand.

The forum advisory committee met twice more during the project, and, because I was primarily responsible for the project, I served as chairperson. However, I was sick in bed at the time of the second meeting and had to send my own representative to chair the meeting. When I appeared in my office the next morning, I stood open-mouthed while I heard that it had been the decision of the advisory committee that we should be doing far more with evaluation of the quality of our forums. That's what happens. Go off to the AACJC convention, catch legionnaire's disease or something, and come home to find that you've been dethroned. The advisory committee--my own creation--had taken over the project, and, of course, really that was precisely what I had hoped would happen at some time during the project. So, we did far more to evaluate the quality of our final forums.

At the last advisory committee meeting, we gave all of ourselves certificates of appreciation from Black Hawk College. And, with a

certain measure of ironic pleasure, I presented one to our AFT local, a community co-sponsor, perhaps the first and only time that its contributions to Black Hawk College will be officially recognized. Of course, these certificates served to increase the project's visibility in the community, for each representative could be expected to take it back to an organizational meeting and to mention our project once again.

We also used this meeting to reach final conclusions, to collect additional information on work completed by the co-sponsors, and to collect the final written reports from committee members. Finally, we discussed the future of community forums at Black Hawk College. An important result of this meeting was that all co-sponsors received letters suggesting that one of their meetings this year be a forum. Thus far, we've scheduled four such forums. So, I'm still coordinating forums this year, and the work is still entirely a faculty project.

It was with regret that I saw our forum advisory committee break up. Some how I wished that someone else at Black Hawk College in need of good community workers and friends had wanted to make a continuing use of it.

Our publicity efforts started early. We called up our news media contacts from "Crime and Justice" and explained what we were doing now; we mailed out over 4,000 brochures; we developed informational sheets for reporters on each event, informational packets, newspaper ads, and press releases; and we distributed 5,000 bookmarks on the project through the River Bend Library System--all well in advance. We met individually with faculty moderators to help and to ensure that they were prepared. And, because we had completed so much

work in advance, we had time for special publicity efforts later. These included presentations on popular culture and mass media at the meetings of co-sponsoring organizations, a radio call-in forum, a television call-in forum, two public radio interviews, a special news feature story, a videotape on one topic for use over cable television, a television interview, cable television broadcast of one town meeting, and a television news feature on another.

To me, perhaps the most rewarding aspect of our spring forums was the "spin-off." I've already indicated a lot of it, but let me emphasize "spin-off" in relation to our co-sponsors themselves. When the Rock Island County Council on Alcoholism wanted to inquire whether or not those in residence at its woman's half-way house could receive financial aids for study at Black Hawk College, the representative came to my office and not to the financial aids office. Right now this same representative and I are working with a representative from one of our state universities to establish a cooperative educational program to train alcohol counselors. We had two co-sponsors--Parents without Partners and the alcoholism council--join up during the project, a linkage that I understand is encouraged by the national PWP organization. As a result, these two groups have been holding workshops during the last six months on the effects of alcohol on the family. And these two organizations entered into a triangular arrangement with the Black Hawk Folklore Society, another co-sponsor, in what we have come to call "the co-sponsor trade-off." PWP listed folklore society concerts as recommended events in its newsletter, and the society gave the council's halfway house free concert tickets. PWP secured recognition within its national organization's magazine for its work in the

project, and the representative has gained enough knowledge to become a local expert for other PWP chapters on the topic of "community awareness." This same representative received a special community service award from her organization for serving as its representative to the project. And Church Women United, another co-sponsor, called this summer for 100 copies of our project's final recommendations for its state meeting.

Perhaps the value and meaning of co-sponsoring in community forums for organizations is best expressed in the concluding statement from a report prepared by one of the forum advisory committee representatives:

> So what did we get? We demonstrated to ourselves our worth.... We represent collectively a valuable organization. We have gained exposure, prestige, press[locally and nationally], friends, contacts, resources, informal conversation topics, formal program materials, future opportunities for community involvement. We have a reason to be living.

And this representative meant every work of this, I know.

I think that an appropriate way to conclude my description of the "Black Hawk College Model" is to explain what it has meant to me personally. Early I decided that no faculty member--myself included--would be assigned routine duties, like stuffing envelops. So we had two part-time employees take care of details, and we kept ourselves free to concentrate on planning, on the humanities, on experimentation, and on evaluation of the model. We also were free to have fun. Thus, I thoroughly enjoyed my community forum work last year. I also learned more than I have time to explain and came to understand in new

ways what our college's relationship to its community should be. As a result of this experience, I want to help coordinate more community forums, but I also want to move into other new cooperative work with the community--co-sponsorship of educational programs and courses with community organizations and agencies, off-campus and on-the-job study and internships, other types of community-based sponsored experiential learning, traditional humanities course offerings in new time frames and settings, and a basic skills curriculum for non-traditional students, especially those referred to us by community agencies. I was interested in most of this work before community forums, but, now, thanks to them, I understand far better how to go about the work. And, finally, participation in this project has made it possible for me to meet all of you--for that I am especially grateful.

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